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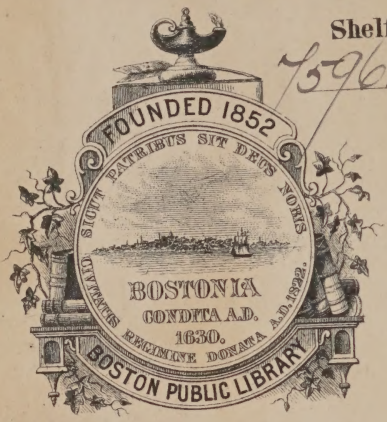

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ADVANCEMENT

IN THE

MEANS AND METHODS

OF

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

A

LECTURE

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF INSTRUCTION,

AT ITS FOURTEENTH ANNIVERSARY AT PITTSFIELD, MS.

BY DAVID P. PAGE,
Principal of the English High School, Newburyport.

BOSTON:
WILLIAM D. TICKNOR & CO.,
Corner of Washington and School Sts.
MDCCCXLIV.

337
Oct 15 1894

PITTSFIELD, AUGUST 16, 1843.

D. P. PAGE having delivered a Lecture on the "Advancement in the Means and Methods of Public Instruction,"

On motion of Mr. Pettes, voted that two thousand copies of Mr. Page's Lecture be printed by the Censors for gratuitous circulation.

SOLOMON ADAMS, *Sec'y.*

LECTURE

ON

ADVANCEMENT IN THE MEANS AND METHODS

OF

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

Among all the various blessings bequeathed to us by the ancestors of New England—if we except religious freedom—none has stronger claims for our attachment or demands more imperiously our warmest gratitude than their early institution of the *Common School System*. As if endowed with wisdom beyond the age in which they lived, and with a liberality far above the people from whom they came out, they were the first to declare—if not the first to entertain—the important doctrine, that religious and civil liberty, in the broadest sense, could have a permanent foundation only in a general diffusion of intelligence in the whole community. They were the *very first men* to declare positively against an exclusive *aristocracy* in mental cultivation ; the first to open

freely and fully to all classes and to both sexes the fountains of knowledge; the first to establish and maintain at the public expense, wherever they felled the forest and founded a settlement—second in their affections only to the ordinances of religion—the MEANS OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

And perhaps it is no censurable pride in us that we fondly—and, it may be, somewhat boastfully—repeat the fact, that the spot which is now the site of the city of Salem, in the county of Essex and commonwealth of Massachusetts, was the locality of the *very first public free school the world ever saw!*

To us, then, who are met within the limits of a State so honorably distinguished in the annals of human improvement; to us, who are the descendants of a New England ancestry and have been nurtured amid New England institutions; standing as we now do between the illustrious dead on the one hand and the rising progeny of such a noble parentage on the other; charged as we are with the responsible office of ministering with pure hands and devoted hearts to the intellectual growth of a rising multitude, and of perpetuating to others yet to come the blessings we have richly received,—it cannot be uninteresting to pause a few moments, by the way, and inquire what improvements have been introduced, and what advancement we have made in an enterprise so worthy of its founders and so necessary to our very existence as a free and self-governing people.

The subject of this lecture, is the "ADVANCEMENT IN THE MEANS AND METHODS OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION."

It will scarcely be necessary, perhaps, to discuss the

question whether there has been *any* advancement in these matters ; the memory of any one present will furnish sufficient data to settle that point. The question for us to settle is, "How great has been the advancement and in what does it consist ?"

No remark is more common than that so frequently made by those who now visit our school-rooms, or in any other way are brought acquainted with the condition of our schools, namely : "The youth of the present day have great advantages compared with those enjoyed by their parents." But while we may safely assume that some improvement has been attained, we should not be too confident as to the degree of it, until after due examination we are able to lay our hand upon the items of our educational thrift. We live in an age, it must not be forgotten, of *experimenting ;* an age which avoids too much, perhaps, the slow process of patient induction, but which impetuously rushes forward to its conclusions by overleaping the premises ; an age in which the clamorous pretender is nearly as likely to be greeted and caressed, as the more worthy, but more rare commodity—genuine worth ; an age in which a high-sounding *name* often—like the title of the book which Dr. Johnson compared to a "*cannon placed at the door of a pig-sty*"—announces to the world but very insignificant realities ; an age in some things over-credulous, and hence very frequently imposed upon ; and if the age have all these characteristics, it will involve no hazard to allege that such an age may be an age of "*humbugs.*" I would not be severe upon the profession of my choice. I would be candid. But when we find ourselves surrounded by impositions ; when our politics have become

a *profession*, under the robes of which patriots suck out the life-blood of the republic to aggrandize their party, and withal to aggrandize themselves; when our public financiers and fund-keepers depart from their post and their country, because their funds and their integrity had first departed from them; when our mercantile enterprise is often but speculation without a capital, and bankruptcy is a surer road to wealth than a continuance in a safe and honest business; when the *poor debtor* can frequently afford to maintain a more splendid style of living and a costlier equipage than his "rich" creditor; when our systems of reform have some of them come to need themselves a reform; when the advocates of peace and moderation "get by the ears" among themselves, and quarrel and call hard names about the measures to be used in their warfare; when the apostles of "free discussion," and "liberty of speech," and "rights of conscience," sometimes endeavor to hiss down an opponent, or perhaps essay to enter and forestall the forum or the pulpit dedicated to another cause and appropriated to other voices; when even our holy religion is sometimes distorted by *false lights* and "*new lights*" and extravagances, which, while they humble and grieve the believer, invite the derision and the scoff of the infidel,—I say, when all these things abound, and a thousand others quite as incongruous and quite as wild,—who can wonder that the cause of education should contract the general disease, and bring forth among its precious fruits some of the excrescences and corruptions so common to the times? We might fairly anticipate such results, and accordingly we find them. We have our literary reformers, our

literary financiers, our literary bankrupts and pretenders, and our literary "new lights."

I have remarked that our times are characterized by a fondness for high-sounding names. For examples of this, we may notice the business advertisements in our public papers, and the signs in our public streets. The dealer in house furniture, however limited his stock or his business, is sure to have the imposing "Warehouse" placed over his door. The man who sells oysters in some dismal ground room, or perhaps at the corner of the street from a board resting upon two flour barrels beneath an awning, solicits custom from the passer-by, with the attractive "Oyster Saloon," painted in black letters above his head. The man who lives by *shaving* his customers has ceased to hang his hopes for a livelihood upon the spirally-painted pole, so long the unequivocal mark of distinction for his craft; he now invites customers by the sonorous cognomen of "Gentlemen's Establishment." The industrious young lady, who has learned the art of fitting dresses for her neighbors, and has opened what was formerly a *shop* in the country village, now denominates it "Emporium of Fashion."

Our rail-road people, in order to designate the place where may be seen the strange mixture of men and machinery, cars and coaches, hackmen and hangers-on, lumber and luggage,—the "great trunk, little trunk, band-box and bundle" of the traveling public, mingled in admirable confusion, have introduced among us that awkward foreign word "depot;" and as if there were a charm in the word, hucksters in every department have adopted it as best fitting their purpose; and we have our "Clothing depots," our "Furnishing depots," our "Pill

depots ;" and last, though not least, our dealers in *cheap literature*, having collected together all the varieties of trash which the press has vomited forth upon a surfeited people, from the vilest penny sheet to the latest translation of a French love story, have taken to themselves the title of "*Literary Depots.*"

Precisely after the same style, the credulity of our people is not unfrequently addressed in the public papers, in which the skill of teachers and the excellence of certain Academies, Institutes, Literary Saloons, Classic Halls, and the like, are so pompously heralded, that one is almost compelled to doubt whether he has not just awoke from the reverie of a hundred years, and found himself among the incredibles of the twentieth century. The "*Royal Road*" to learning, so long sought for, has ceased to be a desideratum. As for study and diligence, they are discarded as old-fashioned and unworthy means of becoming wise and great. In some of these advertisements, it is signified that the pupil shall be *amused* by the magic art of the teacher, unconsciously into the depths of learning, and that his severest toil shall be listening to very attractive lectures, illustrated by uncommonly brilliant experiments, which shall make him thoroughly acquainted with great things, not only without study, but without thought. Reading is to be taught in a month; Philosophy, Natural and Moral, in another month; Chemistry in two lectures; Music and Arithmetic in a fortnight ; Book-keeping in three days, and *Penmanship*, (I quote from an advertisement before me), "even where the hand is most awkward and cramped—to a pupil of any age, from seven years to sixty, impart-

ing the most finished style, in *only twelve lessons*, occupying the *short space of six hours.*"

Nor is all this pretension uncalled for; a demand in the community has called forth the supply; the credulity has welcomed the imposition. Open almost any paper of wide circulation, and you may see that which will remind you of the imposing sign hung out by

"A certain spectacle maker, I 've forgot his name;"

and if you will look about you, you may also see those, who will aptly enough remind you of the *swain*, who in the hope of supplying a trifling defect in his early education, applied to him for "*helps to read.*"

Before we assume, then, that the cause of *public instruction* has moved onward gradually, though slowly, from the settlement of New England to the present time-frankness demands that we should confess the impediments that have clogged its course;—nay, ingenuousness and truth alike demand that we should point out the impositions of the artful and the mistakes of the injudicious. *Every innovation, then, has not been an improvement.* When men began to discover that the old methods of teaching were somewhat too mechanical and in some instances too abstract, many went quite too far in *explaining* beforehand to the mind of the scholar, what it would have been better for him to *study out* by the exercise of his own ingenuity. School books soon followed, so filled with colloquial explanations and childish illustrations, as literally to "bury up" the little solid matter they contained; and in some, so abundant had this *small talk* become, that had their use been long continued, I am persuaded that the minds not only of pupils, but of the teachers, must have been essentially cramped

and enervated by them. This was an extreme even worse than the one it was intended to cure, on the ground that *too much* assistance either to the physical or mental efforts of a child, is decidedly worse than *too little*.

So when it began to be discovered that the *government* in some of the old fashioned schools was too austere and too tyrannical—too much enforced by the severer modes of punishment, such as Solomon recommended as sometimes salutary, there were many who rose up to favor the opposite extreme; and in their zeal to denounce all severity, were ready to sacrifice all order and respect on the part of their pupils. "This *barbarism*," we were every where told, "was a relic of the *dark ages*, and, like a belief in witchcraft and apparitions, was to be abandoned, amid the *daylight* of the present age." This idea, promulgated by teachers, gained some popularity with parents, and a jubilee was forthwith proclaimed to the pupils of very many schools; the rod, that old and faithful servant, was snatched from its dignified and time-honored resting place in the affections of the lovers of good order and subordination, and with ruthless zeal, excommunicated as a traitor and a tyrant,—and with reckless hand consigned to the doom of many an ancient martyr. In some instances, the reform was carried so far as to introduce a republican form of government, in which the teacher scarcely reserved the "*one man*" power of exercising the veto. The general proclamation of the doctrine that punishment was unnecessary, if not absolutely cruel,—announced as it was with applause by the public lecturer, and repeated at the fireside by kind-hearted and indulgent parents, did very much to introduce a spirit of insubordination in many of

our schools, which it will require time and persevering firmness to subdue. Probably no cause has operated so strongly to make corporal punishment, of the severer kind, *necessary*, as this attempt to *over-do* a desirable reform. Many teachers worked their way into popularity by publicly declaring their conversion to the new doctrine; but many found the crown they thus acquired to be a very difficult one to retain. The doctrine once embraced and proclaimed in their schools, was attended by such unseemly developements in its results, that not a few teachers were reduced to the alternative of abandoning their *new light*, or of abandoning their profession ; or, perhaps, adding a third horn to the dilemma, they found relief for themselves by taking charge of a *female school*. This, like the last mentioned extreme, is working its own cure; and as the light is most precious to such as have groped their way through darkness to seek it,—so, I doubt not, the cause of truth on this point will in the end gain much strength, on account of the fact, that so many of the profession have made the circuit of this error to find it.

Notwithstanding these admissions of error, it cannot be denied, I think, that the cause of public instruction, in its *means* and *methods*, has undergone a gradual, and in many respects a very decided improvement. Perhaps this improvement is a *variable quantity*—greater in some places than in others ; yet taken in general terms, it is capable of admeasurement, at least by approximation. The *amount* of improvement will be best shown by taking a few specific items, and running a comparison between their condition *as it was* and *as it is*. It will be the object of the following pages to institute such a comparison,—

I. IN REGARD TO SCHOOL HOUSES.

Whatever the structure and conveniences of the first school houses in New England were, there is no account of them to my knowledge handed down to the present generation. It is sufficient praise for our ancestors that they established free schools, and provided accommodations for them of any kind. Nor is it necessary that we should go farther back than fifty years, to find structures, between which and the modern ones a comparison sufficiently striking for our purpose may be traced. Indeed I may go no farther than to some existing relics of a past generation,—and it may be that all who hear me have already in their own mind, and perhaps have had, at some past time connected with their own school-day experience, the *very pattern*, which will answer our present purpose.

In examining quite a large number of these declining monuments of ill-adapted ingenuity, I have found that a few prominent characteristics mark them all. It seems to have been deemed essential that these edifices, built for the accommodation of all, should have a place in the *very centre of the district*, determined by actual admeasurement; and wherever the rods and links should fix that point, whether hill or valley, forest or meadow, "highway or byway"—*there*, and there only must the edifice go up, and thither must the children wend their course, perhaps far away from the village, far away from the principal road, (an object of no small consequence, particularly in winter), far away from a suitable site for any building, to gain their first impressions of school.

It would seem also to have been considered quite essential that each of these buildings should be furnished with the most *ample fire places "gaping wide;"* and at the same time with *slanting floors*—the seats rising one above another, suggesting to the modern visitor the idea that they were designed for vast *roasting places*, in which each *victim* could have an equal chance to see and appreciate the towering flames, as they rose in columns to the elevated mantel piece and roared up the incandescent flue. Of the capacity of these fire places, none can better judge than those who have taken their "turn" of a winter's morning, to "make the fire" for a country school, some twenty-five years ago. Who does not well remember the rotund back-log of a fathom long; the ample bowlders from a neighboring stone wall for andirons; the "forestick" of a sled's length, to support the superincumbent mass of clefts, small-wood and chips, to the amount of the third part of a cord, to be consumed for an ordinary day's warming of the district school house? Who does not recollect the merry sound of axes, when the larger boys spent most of the afternoon in chopping at the door the fuel for the next day's burning?

I have mentioned the sloping floor upon which it was difficult to stand at ease, if not to stand at all; and which in the ascent might remind one of the worthy Pilgrim's Hill of Difficulty, and in the descent, of his approach to the Valley of Humiliation, in which, in the quaint language of Bunyan, "*it were dangerous for one to catch a slip.*" I might go on to mention the inconvenient fixtures of these rooms; the seats from which dangled many an aching limb, hopeless of finding rest or a resting

place; the *forms* without backs, upon which many a weary urchin sank—to sleep; and slept—to fall; and fell—to electrify the little community with an extempore *solo*, in which like some discarded politician, he deigned to "*define his position.*"

I might also mention the ill-jointed wainscoting by which the room was on all sides amply ventilated; the shattered ceiling; the scanty light; the marks of juvenile industry, in the shape of scorings and engravings upon the desks; the grotesque and even obscene drawings upon the walls; the scanty play-ground; the absence of all out-door accommodations; the dreary aspect about the premises of many of these buildings; the gloomy loneliness of the location, where, at certain seasons of the year at least, in the language of Sprague, "the rank thistle nodded in the wind, and the wild fox dug his hole unscared." I might allude to the absence of taste, either in the style of the buildings themselves, or in any little decoration about them. But all this would be but repeating what has been well and justly said before, and what every observing person has so often witnessed as to render the recital unnecessary.

But I gladly turn from a topic so unflattering to the taste and ingenuity of those we otherwise cheerfully applaud, and would point you to the very many new and elegant structures which now adorn our towns and villages. By the agency of several *associations* and several distinguished individuals, a correct taste has been diffused through the community so generally, that an unsightly, ill-constructed *new school house* is almost an anomaly. Much ingenuity has been concentrated upon the items of ventilating, lighting, warming and furnishing

the school room, so that in all these respects, little is left to be done, certainly little to be known. It has been again and again demonstrated that a small sum of money, expended in *ornamenting* a building of this sort, particularly in the way of painting both within and without, is capital well invested; and that a good return will be realized in the preservation of the property, not only from the wastes of the weather and the trespasses of time, but also from that swifter and more deplorable spoiling, which is the result of youthful activity coupled with youthful destructiveness. While an unsightly, ill-contrived and unornamented structure will, as it were, invite their depredations, they will reverence good taste and a fair finish so far, as to restrain the love of mischief, ere it desecrates and despoils.

The fitness of things has now become the question, and so widely diffused is the information on this point, that we confidently set down the improvement in the construction of school houses as one of the greatest achievements of the age, and one of the strongest proofs of advancement in the enterprize of public instruction.*

II. A COMPARISON OF OLD AND NEW SCHOOL BOOKS WILL SHOW A DECIDED ADVANCEMENT.

In the schools of the Puritan Fathers, the book in English chiefly relied on was the Bible. In those

* Those who wish to see the most able essays on the structure of school houses, should obtain the address before the *Essex County Teachers' Association by Rev. G. B. Perry*, and the excellent Report of the Hon. Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education.

schools little else than reading, writing and a very little of arithmetic, was aimed at. The writing was taught by the written copy of the teacher, and arithmetic was taught by his dictation and by exercises written by himself in the cyphering books of the scholars. In these books he usually transcribed the more important rules, so that each scholar's manuscript book was little other than an arithmetic on a very small scale. Authors of new systems were not then found going about the country, proposing to supply schools with entire new sets in exchange for old ones, in order to get their works introduced. All branches of learning beyond those above enumerated, were confined to the *Grammar schools* or the University, where Latin and Greek were perhaps more thoroughly taught than they have ever been in this country since the days of Cotton Mather. All who in that day learned grammar, learned it through those languages.

This account of the studies and school books of the earliest New England schools will apply with very little alteration to the whole period down to the Revolution. The Psalter and Dilworth's Spelling Book and the New England Primer had been added to the list; but the branches taught, and the manner of teaching them, continued very much the same down nearly to the close of the last century. It has indeed been said that *writing* and *spelling* were better taught in those schools than they are at present. If this be true, which, (judging from the orthography to be found in most of the old Record Books,—and those books, it is presumed, were the work of chosen men,) may be fairly doubted,—I say if this be true, it is no more than should be expected of them, as

these branches probably received more than one half the attention and time of both teacher and pupil.

Several very valuable books for that day came to light near the close of the last, and the beginning of the present century. Authors began to multiply on this side of the water, and Arithmetics, Geographies, Readers, &c., some of considerable merit, began to appear.

To any one, however, who will examine the books used in the schools from twenty-five to fifty years ago, one prominent defect in them will be apparent. It is this;—*they address the memory rather than the reasoning powers.* They aim at imparting knowledge mainly, not at disciplining the faculties of the mind. They seek to be remembered, rather than understood. Had I time, and were it not invidious—for even old school-books must be treated reverently—I could point out various illustrations of the truth of this remark; as it is, I must rely on the memory and observation of those who hear me.

I shall venture to mention *the* book which I consider the *pioneer* in this country in the great reform in school books. It is a book of small size, of no very loud pretensions, but it is THE BOOK which has done more in this country, not only for the particular branch upon which it treats, but for most other branches, by its indirect influence upon the character of teachers and authors, and the method of imparting instruction in general, than any other that has been written in our language. It is that little volume called "FIRST LESSONS IN ARITHMETIC," *by* WARREN COLBURN. In this book of 172 pages, Mr. Colburn has opened the *principles* of arithmetic, in a strictly analytic way, as he says, after the

method of Pestalozzi, and in this book, *the reason—the understanding* is addressed, and led on step by step, till the whole is taken into the mind and becomes a part of it; the memory is little thought of, yet the memory cannot let it slip; for what has been drunk in as it were by the understanding and made a part of the mind, the mind never forgets! To how many a way-worn and weary pupil under the old systems—to how many a proficient who could number up his half dozen authors and twice that number of manuscript cyphering books,—to how many a *teacher* even who had taught the old systems winter after winter, and yet saw but as "through a glass darkly,"—to how many such was this book on its appearance, *their* "*First Lessons in Arithmetic.*" Warren Colburn's name should be written in letters of gold for this service.*

Subsequent to the year 1820, very great improvements have been made in most other branches. These improvements have consisted very much in the simplification, to a certain extent, of the subjects themselves, and in avoiding the errors of the old plan, and addressing mainly the reasoning powers by leading them onward by an inductive analysis to a clear comprehension of the subjects, rather than relying simply on the committing of forms of words to memory.

I am aware, as I have before hinted, that this simplifying process has been abused. It has undoubtedly been in some cases carried too far. Authors have sprung up

* It was not my design to mention by name any book published within the present century, but it was necessary to depart from this resolution in order to show where the reform began.

who have assumed that neither teachers nor pupils who should use their books would possess to any extent the power of thought. These authors have not only minced their precepts so very fine as to have nothing left of them, but they have attempted to supply the *mental gullets* through which they were to be swallowed. They have filled their books with questions whose *name is legion*, and *such* questions as absolutely put to the blush the spirit of enquiry itself,—and then, as if mind could not think, from the plenitude of their own wisdom and benevolence, they have added the answers, and *such* answers as the idiot himself could scarcely miss. We have had "*inductive*" and "*productive*" systems, and systems in which the *inductive and productive* have been joined in matrimony, which, in some cases acting as positive and negative quantities, have cancelled each other, and left the covers of the books with *nothing between them!*

But while these abuses are justly despised, by judicious teachers, it is very certain there have been within twenty-five years, many solid improvements in this department.

III. A COMPARISON OF THE BRANCHES FORMERLY TAUGHT, AND THOSE NOW BROUGHT WITHIN REACH OF THE PUPILS OF COMMON SCHOOLS WILL SHOW AN ADVANCEMENT.

Under the topic of *school books* I have mentioned the branches taught in the public schools up to the close of the last century. Among these *English Grammar* was not found. Except those comparatively *few men* who were educated at college, scarcely one in a thousand could know anything of the grammatical structure of his

own language, till within the last half century. Teachers of the common schools even within twenty-five years, were not unfrequently found who did not pretend to any knowledge of this kind. And a very large proportion of the common teachers knew little more than the forms of declension and conjugation. Yet *now* grammar is one of the legally required branches, and scarcely a school can be found, except in some extremely unfavorable locality, where grammar is not respectably—though not *now* perfectly taught;—and the number of those who now speak and write grammatically, compared with those who did so in an equal population thirty years ago, is not less than *one hundred to one*. I confess the imperfect teaching of this branch, and the imperfect learning of it *now;* I know there are many who acquire the shadow without the substance,—yet the gain is so very great, that it is alone quite an important item of advancement. So too, but a few years ago, the books on Natural Philosophy and Algebra were prepared exclusively for college students, and the common people were shut out from any participation in a knowledge of these useful branches. These are now brought, to a certain extent, within reach of the common scholars, and most of the elements of these branches are grasped and mastered by the youth at the public schools. The same might be said of several other studies now successfully taught in the common schoo s.

IV. A COMPARISON OF THE TEACHERS AS THEY WERE AND AS THEY ARE, WILL SHOW A CONSIDERABLE ADVANCEMENT.

It would ill become one of an existing class to detract from the worth or the ability of his predecessors, and

engage in pronouncing a eulogium upon his cotemporaries. This is a task I shall not undertake. I can by no means undervalue those venerable men who have, in past generations, unobtrusively labored, according to their opportunity, to give wisdom, strength and character to the minds of a growing people. Many of these were men who would grace any profession, and would be honored in any age. Many of them, I doubt not, have exerted influences for good which shall extend in widening and in glorious results, and be felt with gratitude long after the name of an Alexander, a Cæsar or a Napoleon shall have faded from the memory and the praise of men.

It shall content me then to leave the merits of past teachers to the living records they have made for themselves in the memory and the estimation of those who knew them.

Yet, excepting a few who rose above their circumstances and the age in which they lived, I have supposed there would be no arrogance in assuming for the present occupants of the field *a moderate superiority*. The public sentiment surely *demands* more of a teacher now than ever before, and the legislation of several of the States following up this sentiment, or rather giving voice and utterance to it, has prescribed requirements which would have excluded a large portion of those in office thirty years ago. This sentiment has given rise to a spirit of enquiry and discussion which has resulted in the accumulation of a vast amount of light upon the qualifications, the duties, the modes of government and methods of instruction, the motives to be addressed, the incentives to be employed, indeed upon every topic that regards the

success of the teacher. This same sentiment has given rise to the establishment of institutions in some of the States, expressly dedicated to the suitable preparation of candidates for this important office. It has given rise to numerous *associations*, likewise, of those actually engaged in the service, together with others friendly to the object, the very design of whose meetings is to purify and elevate the *profession of the teacher*. Indeed this same public sentiment has gone so far as to demand that *teaching should be a profession;* that teachers, in the more important schools at least, should throw themselves upon their resources as teachers for support, and, giving up mainly other pursuits—except so far as to keep pace with the progress of the times—devote their time, talents, study, zeal and energy to their duty as a profession. Public sentiment has even gone farther, in some instances at least, and added the *remuneration of a profession*, thus leaving the teacher free from other cares, to devote himself to what should be his only care—*to be worthy of the age in which he lives.*

With all these facilities then, it is certain the teachers of the present day *should* be better than their predecessors. If they are not, under all these accumulated circumstances in their favor, it is their own fault.

Having dared to assume for the teachers of the present day some moderate degree of superiority over their predecessors even of no very remote age, it will reasonably be expected of me, that I should intimate in what particulars such superiority consists. From this task I shall not shrink. In few words, I should say it consists in a more *philosophical preparation* for their duties, and in a more *thorough knowledge of the principles* of the branches

to be taught. Teaching was formerly entered upon by most aspirants to the office, without deep reflection as to the nature of the responsibilities assumed, or a clear perception of the importance of being *specially* furnished for one of the most delicate and difficult offices—that of operating upon the human intellect. It is true that very many in former times entered upon the responsibilities of teaching, as they "*let themselves out*" to perform manual labor, having a view almost entirely to the recompense; and apparently without the least suspicion that higher qualifications were necessary for the one employment than for the others. They could perhaps follow the formal letter of a book upon a given branch, but they knew but little of the *why and the wherefore*, and they knew still less of the most successful methods of reaching and interesting the minds of the pupils, and exciting in them the spirit of inquiry. It is very much to be doubted whether one in a score of the common class of teachers twenty-five years ago had any higher ideas of an education, than the storing up in the memory of a collection of facts—which would constitute, as far as it went, a certain amount of knowledge. They seemed, at least, never to have dreamed that truly educating a mind consists first in inspiring it with a *thirst for improvement—growth —enlargement;* and then in *disciplining its powers* so far, that with the ordinary means *it could go on to improve itself.* They seemed not to consider that much more depends upon the formation of correct habits of study—of reasoning and of invention, than upon the amount of *knowledge* which can be imparted in a given time.

I dare say many of us remember the manner in which any developements of the spirit of inquiry were wont to

be treated in our schoolboy days. I may never forget the passage I first made through the *Rule of Three*, and the manner in which my manifold perplexities respecting "direct and inverse" proportion were solved. "Sir," said I after puzzling a long time over "more requiring more, and less requiring less"—"will you tell me why I sometimes multiply the *second and third terms* together, and divide by the first—and at other times multiply the first and second, and divide by the third?" "Why because 'more requires more' sometimes and sometimes it requires less—to be sure. Havn't you read the rule, my boy?" "Yes sir, I can repeat the rule, but I don't understand it." "Why, it is because 'more requires more and less requires less'!" "But *why* sir, do I multiply as the rule says?" "Why, because 'more requires more and less requires less,'—see the *rule says so.*" "I know the rule says so, but I wished to understand why——" "Why? why?" looking at me as if idiocy itself trembled before him—"why?—why because the *rule says so;*—don't you see it?—☞*More requires more and less requires less;*"—and in the midst of this inexplicable combination of *more and less* I shrunk away to my seat, to follow the rule because "*it said so;*" and when I had wrought out all the problems and got the answers without *comprehending* a single step in the process, I was told that I was a very good scholar,—and to be sure I did not go unrewarded; for at the examination a few weeks after, the visiters were told that I had been *through* the Rule of Three; and as proof of my proficiency, I was called upon to recite the very rule, which I did, not failing to lay all suitable emphasis upon "*more requiring more and less requiring less.*"

This indeed is a specimen of the manner in which many a boy was "*carried through*" arithmetic twenty years ago. The "*rule says so*"—was the cure for all inquisitiveness in the scholar. It was so in other branches. The letter of the book was to be followed, and any attempt to peep behind the veil was discouraged and even frowned upon.

It must be confessed that we have not attained even at this day to a complete triumph over such abuses of the profession, as is implied by entering it without preparation, and exercising it without judgment or tact. Yet it must be said that in these respects there has been a great gain. The number has increased, very much, of those who do thoroughly understand the *nature* of a teacher's duties, and the object at which he is to aim. The proportion is very much greater of those who understand the principles—the very elements of what they teach, and who are more anxious to inculcate the "why and the wherefore" than to store the memory with unintelligible and barren facts.

Another improvement of the present teachers over their predecessors, I conceive, consists in the better methods of imparting instruction. *Classification* is more thought of than formerly, and the new modes of conducting recitations, in which the object is not simply to apply a test of the scholar's application to his lesson, but also to ascertain how far the understanding has grasped the subject. Formerly recitations were generally so conducted, that only one individual came in contact with the teacher at a time; and even if he could and would explain the principles of the lesson, his time thus poorly economized would fail for the purpose.

Visible illustrations are much more relied upon by teachers now than formerly, and by means of the *blackboard* and other helps, a *class* of ten or fifteen may now be as easily instructed, and on account of the saving of time, very much *more thoroughly* instructed, than an *individual* could be under the old process. Except in those schools where irregularity of attendance interrupts and destroys all classification, very much is gained by the new plan.

The introduction of system into our schools by most teachers at present, is a great gain. By *system*, I mean a definite arrangement in the *day's-work*, so that every class has something to do, and a definite *time* to do it in. A very prominent defect in many of the old schools, (and perhaps some of the modern ones,) was, that the business of the day would come along "*just as it happened*"—by chance. If one scholar or class was not ready, another would be called, and there being no particular time for the various exercises, there would very likely be *no exercises for any time*, and the teacher would hardly know how to find employment for himself in the school.

Now, a teacher is very justly estimated by the judgment and tact with which he divides his time among his own various duties, and the time of his scholars between their studies and recitations. I consider this indeed the principal key to success, both in government and instruction; and whenever I find a teacher who fails in this—(and I am persuaded the number is much less than formerly)—I set it down that such a teacher is very far behind the age, and has no claim as yet to the reputation of an able and successful Instructor.

The following incident will illustrate this point. Hav-

ing occasion to visit, in an official capacity, a school which had been kept by a young teacher some two weeks, she very naturally asked—"what shall I do first?" "Do precisely as you would if I had not come in this afternoon." She looked a little perplexed. At length she inquiringly asked—"Is the geography lesson ready?" "Yes, m'm"—"No, m'm"—"Yes, m'm"—was the ambiguous reply from the class. There was so much of *veto* in the looks of the young geographers, that it amounted to prohibition. "Well, are the scholars in Colburn's arithmetic ready?" This was said with more of hope, but the same ambiguous answer was vociferated from all parts of the room. The teacher looked despairingly,—but recollecting one more resort she said, "Is the grammar class ready?" Again came the changes on "Yes, m'm" and "No, m'm." The teacher gave up and asked what she *should* do. She was again told to go on as *usual* for that afternoon. At the close of the school a single hint was suggested to her,—viz., that she should make out a list of her scholars' duties, and the times when they should be expected to recite their respective lessons. She was told that it would be well to explain this *plan of her day's work* to her school in the morning—and then never again *ask if a class was ready*. The hint was taken; and on subsequent visitations, the several classes were ever ready to respond to the call of the teacher.

The government of schools has changed within fifty years, and it is believed the change is for the better. In *olden times* the *rod* was the principal engine in securing good order. A teacher who could whip "right smart" was considered well qualified to govern. A *word and a blow* was the motto, and we are told on good

authority the *blow frequently went before the word.* The sensibilities of *parents* were formerly less thought of than at present, and few teachers had learned the art of appealing to the better feelings of *pupils* and of *controling* youthful buoyancy and glee, and turning it even to some good purpose. Something on this point has been gained. Though there are *some* who are yet too old-fashioned to abandon the rod altogether; who know, or *think* they know, enough of human nature to convince them that power *must exist*, to be applied in some extreme cases; who, while they rely mainly for success upon those higher and better motives which may be so addressed as to control forty-nine out of fifty, yet would not suffer even the *fiftieth* to go on to his own ruin and to the injury of the whole school, *for the want of a whipping;* yet there are but very few teachers now, who claim respectability in their profession, who make whipping the "*daily food*" of their pupils. Children are not yet quite so perfectly governed *at home* as to render in all cases such aliment entirely unnecessary; and until parents do attain to something like good discipline at the fireside, they certainly should not too loudly complain of the teacher whose trials are far greater than their own, and whose advantages for gaining a knowledge of the temper and disposition of those to be governed are far more limited. Whipping is now getting to be the good teacher's *strange work;* it is *seldom* resorted to by the good teacher, and then only after other methods have been patiently tried without success. It is given as *calomel* should be given, only in cases where the disease cannot be cured by milder and safer medicines, and, where uncured, it would prove fatal. *Calomel* is better than *death*; and *whipping*, bad

as it is, is better than uncontroled *self-will* and *self-destruction*. But for ordinary purposes the good teacher can find easier avenues to the mind and heart of ordinary pupils, than breaking their heads or scoring their bodies; and it is claimed for the existing generation of teachers that these avenues are oftener chosen than formerly.

In making the foregoing comparisons between the present class of teachers and their predecessors, I have spoken in general terms—of whole classes. There were undoubtedly very many in by-gone years who taught successfully and understandingly; who knew well the means of access to the human mind, and the kinds of diet upon which it should be nurtured. So now, it is frankly confessed there are some who assume to teach who are destitute—totally destitute—of the essential qualificatıcns, not only in a literary point of view, but in regard to the intellectual abilities, judgment—tact—energy—perseverance. There are those, who, lacking the proper motives, seek this employment, and having gained admittance to the sanctuary of mind in a district for a single term, do more to mar and deform the delicate yet susceptible material they attempt so rudely to shape, than the judicious labor of a skilful hand can restore in a course of years. Yet it is believed the number of such crude operatives is diminishing, and giving place to more solid wisdom and worth;—and if this be true, if teachers are to be found, who answer the demands of a more enlightened and scrutinizing age, and the number of such is gradually increasing, then in this department we have made some advancement.

I have wished somewhere in this lecture, to bear my testimony in favor of what I consider another improve-

ment in our schools, but have been at a loss whether to place it under the head of school discipline or some other. I refer to the introduction of *Music* into some of our schools as a distinct branch of instruction. To say nothing of the facility with which it may be taught to pupils of tender age, or the advantages which would follow from an increased taste for this acquirement in a community, it is not to be despised as a means of discipline. Music of itself is not destitute of power over the moral feelings, and when associated with suitable sentiments, and sung by the "*many voiced throng of a busy school*," I have never known it fail of producing good results. It may be pursued without detriment to progress in other branches, as, when judiciously managed, it fills up those portions of time which would be otherwise lost in idleness. It serves as a pleasant recreation, after the closer duties of the school, and seasonably introduced, often proves a *safety valve*, through which a love of vociferation and activity, that would otherwise find an escapement in whispering and bustling, is allowed to pass off in a more harmless and more pleasing way. For these and many other reasons, I consider the introduction of music into our public schools a decided improvement.

V. PUBLIC SENTIMENT HAS IMPROVED IN REGARD TO PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

I have already shown that this sentiment has done much directly to improve teachers. Yet I have not covered the whole ground. For more than one hundred and fifty years from the settlement of the country, the public schools did not enjoy the highest place in the af-

fections even of those who established and supported them. And even down to a very recent date, they were regarded as the fit place for the education of the common people, while most of those whose means would afford the expense, sought better advantages for their children at the academy or favorite private school. In this way, some of the best influence has been withdrawn from the public schools. As many of the best scholars were sent away,—the very scholars whose parents could afford to secure for them a constant and a somewhat permanent attendance,—these schools became less interesting to the teachers, who were obliged to labor with pupils whose attendance was necessarily subject to much irregularity and interruption. Besides, a notion seemed to be entertained, that at the *public school*, there were remarkable facilities for acquiring vicious habits; in other words, an impression seemed to prevail among those who could afford to pay for private tuition, that their sons must of necessity be contaminated by mixing with the ruder lads of the "town school." Beyond this, moreover, the scholars of the wealthy being provided for at the academy, the parents took no interest in the success of the public school, or the character of its teacher. No matter who he was, or how little he might know, if he were but hired at a low rate, so as to keep the taxes down, it was the same to them. The affections of such parents being given to those favorite private teachers to whom they had entrusted their children, the public servant was seldom noticed as a man, or cherished by their society as an acquaintance. Hence a good instructor could scarcely be found, who would be willing to teach a public school longer than his own necessities required. He would either desire the better pay, or the more flattering caresses

bestowed upon the private teacher, and as soon as an opening should occur to gratify his aspirations, either to money or popularity, he would leave the public school to seek it.

It is not a little remarkable too, that during all the period above described, the school committees generally consisted of the very men who never sent their children to the public school. Whenever they entered the school, it was evident upon the very face of things, that they were overlooking an institution in which they had little confidence. Indeed, in many places, and for a long, dark period, the very name of "*town school*" excited in the minds of perhaps the majority, some such idea as we associate with the *alms house*,—a sort of necessary evil to provide for those whose want of means prevented their providing for themselves. It was not uncommon to see a boy, who had arrived at fourteen or fifteen years, and had attained to some scholarship, when asked by others where he went to school?—with confusion hang down his head, and with conscious mortification, make the humbling confession in half stifled accents, that he attended the "*town school.*"

A sentiment of this sort gave rise a long time ago to a large number of academies in different parts of New England, which were excellent institutions in themselves, but which worked, nevertheless, a very unfavorable influence upon public schools. It is not the design of these remarks, of course, to undervalue these institutions, particularly when established among a sparse population, where public instruction in the higher branches could not advantageously be maintained. Very great blessings unquestionably have been secured by the facilities thus offered to those who sought a more liberal education than

could be afforded at the public expense. Yet whenever they have been brought into competition with common schools, devoted mainly to instruction in the branches there taught, dividing the youth in the village into two classes—those who could and those who could not afford the expense of tuition, and of course withdrawing the interest and influence of the more wealthy portion of the community from the public school, there their influence, (perhaps without any designed hostility, except it were shown in diminishing the public appropriations)—has been most decidedly unfavorable to the cause of public instruction.

This condition of things being introduced, went on to increase; because the more academies were multiplied, the worse would be the public schools, and hence the people reasoned—"the worse the public schools, the more need of academies." In consequence of this, in almost every large town, the private schools became much more numerous than the public, the money expended for them swelling far beyond the sum appropriated for the public schools; and in almost every country village, an academy, painted white, with a bell and a steeple, while it added beauty to the village, and gave literary laws to those of the place who could afford it, wrought in many cases *literary starvation* to those who depended upon the *town school* for mental training. So true is this, that it is relied upon as a general principle, that where the private schools are most numerous and fully attended, and where an academy of the kind described is located and in flourishing condition, there you will find the public schools in the most deplorable state, because they have fallen into the most deplorable neglect.

So far had this state of feeling been carried, that there

were very many who were ready to declare against all public schools as a positive evil, and who would have been willing, at any moment, to cut off the supplies for their support. Complaining of the hardship of paying for schools they did not use, they would say, "The public schools are so wretched that I cannot trust my children there; if they were in such condition that I could send to them, I should gladly pay for them!" Just as if under this *starving* process, they could have been better! and just as if it had never entered their minds, that by first sending their children, and then giving their encouragement to the school, and their countenance and coöperation to the teacher, was the only way to make them the very schools they desired.

But the time has at length come for the eyes of a blind public to be opened. They have begun to make the discovery that *poor public schools*—maintained just to fulfil the letter of the law, is indeed *but poor economy.* They have begun to perceive that *paying* for *two sorts* of schools, when they need pay for but one, is paying but "*too dearly for the whistle.*" They have begun to learn that public schools, and public teachers, if they be but encouraged and patronized and smiled upon, may be as good at least as private ones,—and they have somehow found out that the rich and poor may meet at the same school, sit at the same desk, recite in the same class, and cherish and reverence the same teacher, and all this without any more "contamination" than has been experienced elsewhere! In several of our large cities and in most of our large towns, the tide of feeling has already turned toward the public schools. School committees are chosen who send to them, more liberal appropriation is made for them, more is expected of them, and it is not

saying too much to add, that under these circumstances, *very much more is accomplished in them.*

Thus much public sentiment *has* done. But this sentiment is a growing sentiment. In almost every town and village in this state, there is an increasing interest in the public schools. Through the labors and measures of the Board of Education, by their able Secretary, a large amount of statistical information has been laid before the people, showing the comparative expense of public and private instruction. And judging from the Reports of school committees in every direction, and from the increased amount of appropriation in a large number of towns within a few of the last years, I think we cannot err in viewing this change of public sentiment as a great point gained toward improvement in the means of public instruction.

If any should suppose, from the manner in which I have spoken of private schools and academies, that I have any hostility toward them or toward their instructors, I entirely disclaim any such motive. I speak as I should feel bound in truth to speak, if I were such a teacher myself, and as I suppose every one must speak, who has considered the subject, and who sincerely desires to see the well-being of the whole people—"the rich and the poor together"—in the highest degree promoted. My own views have been openly uttered, not because "*I love Cæsar less, but because I love Rome more.*"

Thus I have passed with great rapidity over a few tems in which I think the cause of public instruction has made a *decided improvement* on the whole.

I might remark still further on the diffusion of information in the community, as to what is needed to render our favorite system more perfect and complete. Several

journals are now exclusively devoted to the cause, and are widely circulated through the whole body of the people. The whole business of Education is undergoing a discussion, not only in the public assembly and the halls of legislation, but at the smaller gatherings, and even about the social board, and at the firesides of the common people. Improvements in the means or methods of one teacher, are soon reported, and, by means of lectures and the press, go forth to benefit others, and thus become a part of the common stock. The people becoming better informed as to what a good school *should accomplish*, expect more of the school which they support,—and their expectation is sure to find either its *response* or its *remedy*.

In the preceding pages, I have been endeavoring to make it evident that an advance has been made in the MEANS AND METHODS of public instruction. Yet let me not be considered as looking entirely on the bright side of the picture, or as being moved by spirits too buoyant, and a zeal excessively confident. I am perfectly aware that all great reforms have moved slowly, and that, as a general thing, those enterprizes which have accomplished most for mankind, have not burst upon the world with the sudden and surprizing glare of the meteor's flash, but have dawned upon it, like the gentler coming in of the summer's morning, the light and the heat gradually increasing "unto the perfect *day*." And, (to carry the illustration a little farther,) as, while the light of the morning pours in upon the world, there are always caverns "deep and drear," from which darkness retires but slowly and reluctantly, and even the summer's sun may scarcely dissolve the ice which reposes in their depths, or dissipate the damps which hover about their

cheerless recesses,—so in the moral world, we seldom find the work of reform perfectly triumphant, or its results universally successful. It is thus with the reform we have been considering. Prejudices as chilling and unrelenting as the iceberg, still are to be met with in certain quarters; and ignorance, as dense and impenetrable as the darkness which hung over Egypt, still holds its undisturbed and cruel sway over many enslaved and craven minds. Prescriptive usages, and an attachment even to the errors and mistakes of ancestry, still oppose themselves to the progress of reform in many directions. Avarice and short sighted calculation, are not without their influence in retarding improvement among us. The dread of innovation, based perhaps on the failure of some past innovations, is a motive with many. And then, alas! the adventurous, unchastened and misdirected zeal of some of the friends of the cause; the wild and unwarrantable schemes of some of the dreamy movers of the public opinion; the false and ridiculous pretensions of the barefaced egotist, who advertises himself into the favor of the credulous, in order to enrich himself with their coin, and to impoverish them with his own counterfeits,—*all these*, constitute no inconsiderable drawback upon the progress of real improvement, and oppose a formidable barrier to the confidence of an abused and reasonably cautious public.

After all then, very much remains to be known and to be done on this subject. The profession of teaching has yet by no means attained the summit of perfection, nor are all our systems free from impediments and abuses. The public appropriations are in many cases graduated by a mistaken policy, if not by the narrowest parsimony.

Then it not unfrequently happens that the voters in the town meeting, after appropriating the money, limited as that may be, either by an injudicious choice of committees, or by some ill-judged restrictions upon the measures to be used, embarrass all parties concerned, and bring down upon their offspring the deplorable calamity of incompetent teachers, and miserable schools. Small as the sums are, which are raised for the support of schools, what an amount is annually raised to be misspent, if not entirely thrown away!

It well becomes us, then, as a *free people*, as a people whose very institutions are based upon the supposition of a diffusion of intelligence through the whole community, to see to it that we are not surpassed in our efforts, and are actually outstripped in our onward progress by some of the monarchical nations of Europe.

It well becomes us not only to be liberal in the appropriation of the *means*, but to be well informed as to the *methods* of so worthy an enterprize; and if we are convinced we have made some advances, either in the *methods* or the *means*, let every citizen bestir himself to attain more light and a better zeal; to open a more liberal hand, and exercise a stricter oversight; to comprehend more fully our deficiencies, and to devise and encourage real improvements, till we can confer upon our offspring privileges, such as no other people have ever enjoyed, and hand down to our posterity, in coming time, the system *perfected*, the *institution* of which our fathers achieved for us. May our wisdom, our zeal, and our efforts, merit the gratitude of our descendants *as justly and as richly* as our ancestors deserve our own!